

**Thomas Jefferson to Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch
Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, February 14,
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TO THE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE J. MSS.

Monticello, February 14, 1815.

My Dear Friend, —Your letter of August the 14th has been received and read again, and again, with extraordinary pleasure. It is the first glimpse which has been furnished me of the interior workings of the late unexpected but fortunate revolution of your country. The newspapers told us only that the great beast was fallen; but what part in this the patriots acted, and what the egotists, whether the former slept while the latter were awake to their own interests only, the hireling scribblers of the English press said little and knew less. I see now the mortifying alternative under which the patriot there is placed, of being either silent, or disgraced by an association in opposition with the remains of Bonapartism. A full measure of liberty is not now perhaps to be expected by your nation, nor am I confident they are prepared to preserve it. More than a generation will be requisite, under the administration of reasonable laws favoring the progress of knowledge in the general mass of the people, and their habituation to an independent security of person and property, before they will be capable of estimating the value of freedom, and the necessity of a sacred adherence to the principles on which it rests for preservation. Instead of that liberty which takes root and growth in the progress of reason, if recovered by mere force or accident, it becomes, with an unprepared people, a tyranny still, of the many, the few, or the one. Possibly you may remember, at the date of the *jue de paume*, how earnestly

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I urged yourself and the patriots of my acquaintance, to enter then into a compact with the king, securing freedom of religion, freedom of the press, trial by jury, *habeas corpus*, and a national legislature, all of which it was known he would then yield, to go home, and let these work on the amelioration of the condition of the people, until they should have rendered them capable of more, when occasions would not fail to arise for communicating to them more. This was as much as I then thought them able to bear, soberly and usefully for themselves. You thought otherwise, and that the dose might still

be larger. And I found you were right; for subsequent events proved they were equal to the constitution of 1791. Unfortunately, some of the most honest and enlightened of our patriotic friends, (but closet politicians merely, unpractised in the knowledge of man,) thought more could still be obtained and borne. They did not weigh the hazards of a transition from one form of government to another, the value of what they had already rescued from those hazards, and might hold in security if they pleased, nor the imprudence of giving up the certainty of such a degree of liberty, under a limited monarchy, for the uncertainty of a little more under the form of a republic. You differed from them. You were for stopping there, and for securing the constitution which the National Assembly had obtained. Here, too, you were right; and from this fatal error of the republicans, from their separation from yourself and the constitutionalists, in their councils, flowed all the subsequent sufferings and crimes of the French nation. The hazards of a second change fell upon them by the way. The foreigner gained time to anarchise by gold the government he could not overthrow by arms, to crush in their own councils the genuine republicans, by the fraternal embraces of exaggerated and hired pretenders, and to turn the machine of Jacobinism from the change to the destruction of order; and, in the end, the limited monarchy they had secured was exchanged for the unprincipled and bloody tyranny of Robespierre, and the equally unprincipled and maniac tyranny of Bonaparte. You are now rid of him, and I sincerely wish you may continue so. But this may depend on the wisdom and moderation of the restored dynasty. It is for them now to read a lesson in the fatal errors of the republicans; to be contented with a certain portion of power,

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secured by formal compact with the nation, rather than, grasping at more, hazard all upon uncertainty, and risk meeting the fate of their predecessor, or a renewal of their own exile. We are just informed, too, of an example which merits, if true, their most profound contemplation. The gazettes say that Ferdinand of Spain is dethroned, and his father

reestablished on the basis of their new constitution. This order of magistrates must, therefore, see, that although the attempts at reformation have not succeeded in their whole length, and some secession from the ultimate point has taken place, yet that men have by no means fallen back to their former passiveness, but on the contrary, that a sense of their rights, and a restlessness to obtain them, remain deeply impressed on every mind, and, if not quieted by reasonable relaxations of power, will break out like a volcano on the first occasion, and overwhelm everything again in its way. I always thought the present king an honest and moderate man; and having no issue, he is under a motive the less for yielding to personal considerations. I cannot, therefore, but hope, that the patriots in and out of your legislature, acting in phalanx, but temperately and wisely, pressing unremittingly the principles omitted in the late capitulation of the king, and watching the occasions which the course of events will create, may get those principles engrafted into it, and sanctioned by the solemnity of a national act.

With us the affairs of war have taken the most favorable turn which was to be expected. Our thirty years of peace had taken off, or superannuated, all our revolutionary officers of experience and grade; and our first draught in the lottery of untried characters had been most unfortunate. The delivery of the fort and army of Detroit by the traitor Hull; the disgrace at Queenstown, under Van Rensselaer; the massacre at Frenchtown under Winchester; and surrender of Boerstler in an open field to one-third of his own numbers, were the inauspicious beginnings of the first year of our warfare. The second witnessed but the single miscarriage occasioned by the disagreement of Wilkinson and Hampton, mentioned in my letter to you of November the 30th, 1813, while it gave us the capture of York b? Dearborne and Pike; the capture of Fort George by Dearborne also; the capture of Proctor's army on the Thames by Harrison, Shelby and Johnson, and that of the whole

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British fleet on Lake Erie by Perry. The third year has been a continued series of victories, to-wit:

of Brown and Scott at Chippewa, of the same at Niagara; of Gaines over Drummond at Fort Erie; that of Brown over Drummond at the same place; the capture of another fleet on Lake Champlain by M'Donough; the entire defeat of their army under Prevost, on the same day, by M'Comb, and recently their defeats at New Orleans by Jackson, Coffee and Carroll, with the loss of four thousand men out of nine thousand and six hundred, with their two generals, Packingham and Gibbs killed, and a third, Keane, wounded, mortally, as is said.

This series of successes has been tarnished only by the conflagration at Washington, a *coup de main* differing from that at Richmond, which you remember, in the revolutionary war, in the circumstance only, that we had, in that case, but forty-eight hours' notice that an enemy had arrived within our capes; whereas, at Washington, there was abundant previous notice. The force designated by the President was double of what was necessary; but failed, as is the general opinion, through the insubordination of Armstrong, who would never believe the attack intended until it was actually made, and the sluggishness of Winder before the occasion, and his indecision during it. Still, in the end, the transaction has helped rather than hurt us, by arousing the general indignation of our country, and by marking to the world of Europe the Vandalism and brutal character of the English government. It has merely served to immortalize their infamy. And add further, that through the whole period of the war, we have beaten them single-handed at sea, and so thoroughly established our superiority over them with equal force, that they retire from that kind of contest, and never suffer their frigates to cruize singly. The *Endymion* would never have engaged the frigate *President*, but knowing herself backed by three frigates and a razee, who, though somewhat slower sailers, would get up before she could be taken. The disclosure to the world of the fatal secret that they can be beaten at sea with an equal force, the evidence furnished by the military operations of the last year that experience is rearing us officers who, when our means shall be fully under way, will plant our standard

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on the walls of Quebec and Halifax, their recent and signal disaster at New Orleans, and the

evaporation of their hopes from the Hartford convention, will probably raise a clamor in the British nation, which will force their ministry into peace. I say *force* them, because, willingly, they would never be at peace. The British ministers find in a state of war rather than of peace, by riding the various contractors, and receiving *douceurs* on the vast expenditures of the war supplies, that they recruit their broken fortunes, or make new ones, and therefore will not make peace as long as by any delusions they can keep the temper of the nation up to the war point. They found some hopes on the state of our finances. It is true that the excess of our banking institutions, and their present discredit, have shut us out from the best source of credit we could ever command with certainty. But the foundations of credit still remain to us, and need but skill which experience will soon produce, to marshal them into an order which may carry us through any length of war. But they have hoped more in their Hartford convention. Their fears of republican France being now done away, they are directed to republican America, and they are playing the same game for disorganization here, which they played in your country. The Marats, the Dantons and Robespierres of Massachusetts are in the same pay, under the same orders, and making the same efforts to anarchise us, that their prototypes in France did there.

I do not say that all who met at Hartford were under the same motives of money, nor were those of France. Some of them are Outs, and wish to be Inns; some the mere dupes of the agitators, or of their own party passions, while the Maratists alone are in the real secret; but they have very different materials to work on. The yeomanry of the United States are not the *canaille* of Paris. We might safely give them leave to go through the United States recruiting their ranks, and I am satisfied they could not raise one single regiment (gambling merchants and silk-stocking clerks excepted) who would support them in any effort to separate from the Union. The cement of this Union is in the heart-blood of every American. I do not believe there is on earth a government established on so immovable

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a basis. Let them, in any State, even in Massachusetts itself, raise the standard of separation, and its citizens will rise in mass, and do justice themselves on their own incendiaries. If they could have induced the government to some effort of suppression, or even to enter into discussion with them, it would have given them some importance, have brought them into some notice. But they have not been able to make themselves even a subject of conversation, either of public or private societies. A silent contempt has been the sole notice they excite; consoled, indeed, some of them, by the *palpable* favors of Philip. Have then no fears for us, my friend. The grounds of these exist only in English newspapers, edited or endowed by the Castlereaghs or the Cannings, or some other such models of pure and uncorrupted virtue. Their military heroes, by land and sea, may sink our oyster boats, rob our hen roosts, burn our negro huts, and run off. But a campaign or two more will relieve them from further trouble or expense in defending their American possessions.

You once gave me a copy of the journal of your campaign in Virginia, in 1781, which I must have lent to some one of the undertakers to write the history of the revolutionary war, and forgot to reclaim. I conclude this, because it is no longer among my papers, which I have very diligently searched for it, but in vain. An author of real ability is now writing that part of the history of Virginia. He does it in my neighborhood, and I lay open to him all my papers. But I possess none, nor has he any, which can enable him to do justice to your faithful and able services in that campaign. If you could be so good as to send me another copy, by the very first vessel bound to any port in the United States, it might be here in time; for although he expects to begin to print within a month or two, yet you know the delays of these undertakings. At any rate it might be got in as a supplement. The old Count Rochambeau gave me also his *memoire* of the operations at York, which is gone in the same way, and I have no means of applying to his family for it. Perhaps you could render them as well as us, the service of procuring another copy.

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I learn, with real sorrow, the deaths of Monsieur and Madame de Tessé. They made an interesting part in the idle reveries in which I have sometimes indulged myself, of seeing all my friends of Paris once more, for a month or two; a thing impossible, which, however, I never permitted myself to despair of. The regrets, however, of seventy-three at the loss of friends, may be the less, as the time is shorter within which we are to meet again, according to the creed of our education.

This letter will be handed you by Mr. Ticknor, a young gentleman of Boston, of great erudition, indefatigable industry, and preparation for a life of distinction in his own country. He passed a few days with me here, brought high recommendations from Mr. Adams and others, and appeared in every respect to merit them. He is well worthy of those attentions which you so kindly bestow on our countrymen, and for those he may receive I shall join him in acknowledging personal obligations.

I salute you with assurances of my constant and affectionate friendship and respect.

P. S. February 26th. My letter had not yet been sealed, when I received news of our peace. I am glad of it, and especially that we closed our war with the éclat of the action at New Orleans. But I consider it as an armistice only, because no security is provided against the impressment of our seamen. While this is unsettled we are in hostility of mind with England, although actual deeds of arms may be suspended by a truce. If she thinks the exercise of this outrage is worth eternal war, eternal war it must be, or extermination of the one or the other party. The first act of impressment she commits on an American, will be answered by reprisal, or by a declaration of war here; and the interval must be merely a state of preparation for it. In this we have much to do, in further fortifying our seaport towns, providing military stores, classing and disciplining our militia, arranging our financial system, and above all, pushing our domestic manufactures, which have taken such root as never again can be shaken. Once more, God bless you.